

We claim:

1. An authentication infrastructure comprising:

a document;

a submitter client computer running a submitter function that facilitates submission of the document by a submitter;

an authenticator client computer running an authenticator function that facilitates the selective authentication of a signer by an authenticator after the presentation of authentication related information by the signer;

the authentication infrastructure facilitating submission of the document by the submitter via the submitter function, the subsequent signer authentication by the authenticator employing the authenticator function and the signing of the document by the signer after signer authentication.

2. The authentication infrastructure of claim 1 further comprising:

a signer computer running a signer function that facilitates viewing of the document by the signer; and

the authentication infrastructure facilitating document submission by the submitter employing the submitter function, document viewing by the signer employing the signer function and signer authentication by the authenticator employing the authenticator function.

3. The authentication infrastructure of claim 2 wherein the authentication infrastructure further comprising:

the authenticator function selectively requiring the authenticator to provide authentication information before facilitating the selective authentication of the signer; and

the authentication infrastructure requiring the signer to authenticate himself to the authenticator by presenting authentication related information to the authenticator before allowing the signer to sign documents in the presence of the authenticator.

4. The authentication infrastructure of claim 1 further comprising:

a document id for the document;

a password associated with the document id; and

the authentication infrastructure providing the signer access to the document when the signer presents the document id and its associated password.

5. The authentication infrastructure of claim 4 further comprising:

the authenticator function wherein the authenticator function comprises a signing pad that facilitates capturing a signature from the signer;

the authentication infrastructure providing the authenticator access, via the authenticator function, to the document after the authenticator submits the document id and its associated password communicated by the signer; and

the authenticator function facilitating the signing of the document by the signer by capturing the signature of the signer via the signing pad and associating it with the document to be signed.

6. The authentication infrastructure of claim 5 further comprising:

an order of signing by a plurality of signers specified by the submitter;

the submitter function facilitating the specification of the order of signing by the plurality of signers;

the authentication infrastructure capable of selectively enforcing the order of signing by the plurality of signers;

the authentication infrastructure enforcing the order of signing by the plurality of signers when the submitter submits a document for signing via the submitter function.

7. The authentication infrastructure of claim 4 further comprising:

a fax machine communicatively coupled to the authenticator function;

the authenticator function facilitating the signing of the document by the signer by capturing the signature of the signer via the signing pad and associating it with the document to be signed; and

the authenticator function employing the fax machine to selectively transfer the signed document after it has been signed.

8. The authentication infrastructure of claim 4 further comprising:

a digital certificate installed at the authenticator client computer;

the digital certificate presented by the authenticator function running on the authenticator client computer for client authentication; and

the digital certificate employed by the authenticator function for selectively encrypting and decrypting information that are associated with the document during the signing process.

9. The authentication infrastructure of claim 4 further comprising:

a server communicatively coupled to the submitter client computer running the submitter function and the authenticator client computer running the authenticator function;

a signing party certification environment, communicatively coupled to the server, that enhances the authenticator function;

the signing party certification environment comprising the authenticator client computer used by the authenticator to access the document from the server employing the authenticator function, a telephone used selectively by the signer or the authenticator to talk to the submitter of

the document to determine the document id and password associated with the document, and a fax machine selectively used by the authenticator to fax a document signed by the signer to the server or to the submitter.

10. The authentication infrastructure of claim 4 further comprising:

a public and private key pair for the submitter;

the document comprising sections for embedding electronic image signatures and associated dates along with sections for information regarding the placement of such electronic image signatures and dates;

the submitter function making the document secure employing the submitter's public and private key combination when the document is submitted for signing by the submitter;

the authenticator function accessing the document employing the public key of the submitter to enable the signer to sign the document; and

the authenticator function populating the sections for embedding electronic image signatures and associated dates with the signer's signature and associated signing date when the signer signs the document in the presence of the authenticator.

11. An authentication infrastructure comprising:

an authentication network;

a submitter client computer, communicatively coupled to the authentication network, that facilitates document submission by a submitter;

an authenticator client computer, communicatively coupled to the authentication network, that facilitates the selective authentication of a signer by an authenticator after the presentation of authentication related information by the signer; and

the authentication network facilitating document submission by the submitter via the submitter client computer, the signer authentication by the authenticator employing the authenticator client computer and the subsequent document signing by the signer after signer authentication employing the authenticator client computer.

12. The authentication infrastructure of claim 11 further comprising:

a submitted documents that may be signed or unsigned;

a signer client computer, that facilitates viewing of submitted documents;

a document repository, managed by the authentication network, for storing the submitted documents and subsequently selectively retrieving them for signing;

a status information of submitted documents that may change; and

the authentication network managing the storage and retrieval of signed and unsigned submitted documents.

13. The authentication infrastructure of claim 12 further comprising:

the signer client computer facilitating the selective viewing of the submitted document;

the submitter client computer facilitating the selective viewing the submitted documents;

and

the authentication network facilitating the selective storage and retrieval of the submitted documents.

14. The authentication infrastructure of claim 11 further comprising:

the authentication network facilitating a new document submission by the submitter over the Internet employing the submitter client computer and the subsequent signing of the submitted new document by the signer employing the authentication client computer over the Internet after

the signer has been authenticated by the authenticator employing the authentication client computer over the Internet.

15. The authentication infrastructure of claim 14 wherein the new document is created and submitted employing the submitter client computer for signing by the signer over the Internet via the signer client computer.

16. The authentication infrastructure of claim 15 wherein the submitter client computer of the authentication infrastructure further comprising:

an Internet browser-based drag-and-drop rectangular box drawing utility for drawing a rectangular box on the new document that specifies the coordinates of a one of a plurality of information items;

the Internet browser-based drag-and-drop rectangular box drawing utility facilitating selective relocation of the rectangular box on the new document that specifies the coordinates of the one of a plurality of information items; and

the submitter client computer facilitating the storage of the new document along with the specified coordinates of the one of a plurality of information items in the authentication network on submission of the new document by the submitter.

17. The authentication infrastructure of claim 16 further comprising:

the authenticator client facilitating the population of the one of a plurality of information items associated with the document at the specified coordinates when the signer signs the document with the help of the authenticator via the authenticator client computer; and

the authentication network facilitating the viewing of the signed new document by the submitter via the submitter client computer.

18. An Internet-based authentication infrastructure comprising:

a paper document;

a plurality of information items;

a submitter client computer with a scanner for scanning the paper document;

the submitter client computer facilitating the creation of a new document by the scanning of the paper document on the scanner; and

the submitter client computer facilitating the selective specification of placement information for the plurality of information items within the new document.

19. The Internet-based authentication infrastructure of claim 18 further comprising:

a document repository; and

the submitter client computer saving the new document along with the specification of placement information for the plurality of information items in the new document at the document repository as a submitted document.

20. The Internet-based authentication infrastructure of claim 19 further comprising:

an authenticator client computer, communicatively coupled to the document repository, that facilitates authentication of a signer by an authenticator having access to the authentication infrastructure;

the authenticator client computer facilitating the retrieval of the submitted document from the document repository;

the authenticator client computer facilitating the selective population of the plurality of information items in the submitted document by the signer and by the authenticator after authentication of the signer by the authenticator; and

the authenticator client computer facilitating the selective storage of the populated submitted document in the document repository.